



Seattle Olmsted Legacy Task Force Meeting Minutes June 27, 2018

Olmsted Legacy Task Force Members

Present:

Doug Luetjen (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – **Co-chair**
Andy Mitton (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – Member
Jenifer Rees (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – Member
Don Harris (Friends of Seattle Olmsted Parks) – Member
Jennifer Ott (Volunteer Park Trust) – Member
Ed D'Alessandro (Seattle Youth Soccer Association) – Member
Eugenia Woo (Historic Seattle) – Member
Dewey Potter (Park District Oversight Committee) – Member
Zoe Kasperzyk (Associated Recreation Council) – Member
Aditi Kambuj in Susan McLaughlin's absence (Seattle Department of Transportation) – Member
Mark Jaeger (Seattle Public Utilities) – Member
Lyle Bicknell (Office of Planning and Community Development) – Member
Mark Jaeger (Seattle Public Utilities) – Member
Rachel Acosta, in Danyal Lotfi's Absence, (SPR Superintendent's Office) – Facilitator

Excused:

Tom Byers (Seattle Board of Park Commissioners) – **Co-chair**
Susan McLaughlin (Seattle Department of Transportation) – Member
Jeremy Wood (Seattle Human Rights Commission) – Member
Nyah Curcuruto (Teen Representative) – Member
Danyal Lotfi's (SPR Superintendent's Office) – Facilitator

The June Olmsted Legacy Task Force meeting was held at the Superintendent's Office at 100 Dexter Ave N and was called to order at 6:37pm

The board introduces themselves.

Doug reviews the follow-up items from the previous meeting:

- SPR staff to provide budget figures regarding maintenance
- Gaps of Olmsted parks in Seattle– at the next meeting, the members would like a list of areas to acquire properties to continue Olmsted legacy.
- View task force – SPR staff told the Olmsted taskforce at the previous meeting that the department is in the planning stages for this new task force. Doug mentions there will be overlap between the two groups.

Doug reviews the agenda and postpones the approval of the May minutes until the following meeting.

Doug introduces the presentations for the meeting. The Board focused these presentations on answering the following questions:

- How are Olmsted parks being maintained?
- What are the challenges?
- What are the Solutions?
- Do they have best management practices?

Presentation: Volunteer Park Trust (VPT)

Founded in 2012, by several members of Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks and park supporters, to counter what was perceived as a shift in focus for SPR in prioritizing maintenance (ranked 88th out of 100 on Seattle Parks Levy Opportunity Fund).

Mission: To preserve and enhance this city and national landmark for today and generations to come.

Volunteer Park Trust Accomplishments

- Work on landscaping on a regular basis – this is volunteer driven. VPT holds a 2-hour work party every 2nd Saturday. Twice a year the volunteers work on major maintenance projects. The group has performed a total renovation on several beds.
- Events – VPT engages the public in activities, picnics, and free yoga; deflecting negative behaviors through activation. They perform extensive community outreach and use social media to engage people and broaden their audience. They offer historical tours of the park and they have a self-guided walking tour phone application.
- Fundraising! Donor base expanded to 300 people since 2012.

Current and future projects

- VPT is sponsoring the installation of railings on the lily pond with construction starting in the fall. It was a bureaucratic process to get them approved and involved partnering with Seattle Parks and Recreation.
- Amphitheater – The funding is in place to replace the amphitheater. VPT applied for a \$2.5 million major projects challenge grant application.
- Light pole painting to be completed this summer. VPT negotiated with Seattle City Light to get LED lighting and Seattle Parks and Recreation will fix the globes.
- Reservoir, awaiting SPU decision on future of reservoir, but likely will allow for significant renovation and landscape work.
- Water Tower, awaiting SPU timeline for maintenance, landscape improvements.

Irrigation improvements – Working with SPR, Seattle Art Museum and Volunteer Park Conservatory on sustainability.

10 sites chosen for Olmsted rehabilitation money through the Park District. Volunteer Park was identified as one of the 10 sites and they will be adding American with Disabilities Act (ADA) access on 15th. At the same time, Seattle Art Museum is putting in new Olmsted pathways.

Challenges –

- 400 people volunteered on landscaping projects, but it is not enough.
- SPR has made it clear that if VPT creates garden beds, they have to maintain them.
- Volunteer Park Trust relies on grant funding and donations.

Seattle Parks and Recreation - Challenges

- Regulations: ADA, Critical Areas Ordinance
- Social issues – homelessness and drug use
- Equity issues – SPR prioritizes parks based on areas that are socioeconomically disadvantaged, or less “green”. There is a notion that Volunteer Park is for rich people or that it does not represent the community.
- Increased park space to maintain.

Collaboration with SPR –

- Everything they do has to go through SPR, FSOP, Landmarks, Volunteer Park Conservatory, Seattle Art Museum.
- Everything takes a process, diplomacy and patience.
- Brought SPR to the table for amphitheater and there were concerns because of the Seattle Asian Art Museum controversy.
- Questioning details on the lily pond railings – 6 representatives from SPR and they didn’t agree on design or necessity.

Future considerations: As an organization is it essential to grow to take on more responsibility for Volunteer Park? Does the Trust need to find funds to pay for garden maintenance to supplement volunteer efforts?

Fiscal sponsorship by Seattle Parks Foundation – VPT is largely volunteer run, which means the money goes towards the park instead of staff. This enables them to stay nimble.

To SPR staff: What guidelines are you given about maintaining Olmsted Parks? SPR staff respond that SPR has more property, the population of the city has increased significantly and there is a lot of maintenance. Volunteer Park has four staff people who weed, blow, pick litter; mow, aerify the lawn. Staff meets about 70% of the needs at that park. Special events take time to prepare for and that staff time detracts from bed maintenance. Volunteer Park has a new senior gardener who is doing good work.

Deputy Superintendent Holly Miller adds 114,000 people moved to Seattle since 2010. More people are using the parks. City maintenance dollars are not keeping pace with use.

Is there background information or design standards set out for new grounds staff? SPR responds that passing on knowledge is hard to do; institutional knowledge gets lost when staff quit.

SPU needed to alter the landscaping to do some drainage fix near the water tower and collaborated nicely with FSOP for landscape advice and consistency.

Some of the trees are aging and dying because they are part of a life cycle. SPR does not have the capability to do maintenance to trees; but focus on the trees in danger of failing. SPR identified target zones in high use parks to determine levels of potential danger/threat. Short on budget for more staff.

Capital improvement projects include budget for maintenance through facility costs, but they don't always get funded.

Water tower decision: Unknown future with climate change. SPU is trying to determine the water storage need in the city, including for disaster response. Holly adds, grounds maintenance would like to turn sprinklers on earlier, but it would be a huge increase in cost. Maintenance costs ramp up the older facilities get.

The Chair of the City Council Committee did not seem to understand the significance of Olmsted Parks.

Friends of Seward Park (FSP)— Paul Shannon, forest steward and member of Friends of Seward Park begins the presentation. Mr. Shannon works in computational biology transforming data into navigable visual spaces.

The primary purpose of Seward Park as conceived by John C. Olmsted was the preservation of the virgin forest for its aesthetic and recreational values. The park was intended to be a cornerstone of the park and boulevard system.

The Magnificent Forest, as it was named by park historian Don Sherwood, faces a variety of threats to its health, including an unexplained and expanding sword fern die-off, forest fragmentation, invasive plants, proliferation of social trails, and generally being loved to death by an increasing population.

Forest health – Mr. Shannon is working with University of Washington and Washington State University professors regarding the deep concerns about the Seward Park forest dying.

Classified: PSME-TSHE/MANE-POMU

- PSME: doug fir (*pseudotsuga menziesii*)
- TSHE: western hemlock (*tsuga heterophylla*)
- MANE: dwarf oregon grape (*mahonia nervosa*)
- POMU: sword fern (*polystichum munitum*)

Defining characteristics of the dominant species in catastrophic decline; (ferns and western hemlock). 10 acres are not regenerating; 2% survival rate for the ferns and they are dying throughout the region. No known cause. Ferns can live a long time but do not reproduce under tree cover.

>>Invites everyone to visit the forest and he'll give a tour.

Plan strategically –

- Seward's forest is gravely threatened: two dominant (possibly keystone) species are dying off.
- Pervasive failure of natural regeneration requires methodical, innovative restoration.
- Other urban and regional forests affected as well.
- Long-term ecological monitoring desperately needed: which species will be affected next? How are nutrient cycles affected? How successful are restoration strategies?
- Volunteers and intermittent Parks attention woefully inadequate to scope and scale of the problem.
- Convene and support scientific review panel.
- Issue RFPs to regional scientists.
- Sustained funding at some level: this can no longer be done on the cheap.

Donald mentions the \$1 million donation received for forest health and restoration at Seward Park. Plant ecologist Lisa Ciecko oversees the money from the private donor. She adds, the family is considering ongoing funding. There is \$30,000 for die-off research; funding for invasive removal and native plantings. SPR and partners planted 48,000 plants at Seward Park and weeded 260 acres. There are active forest professionals in the park with technical expertise every day, a significant commitment has been made.

Work so far: SPR underbudgeted and overworked, much of the work done is 95% volunteer.

Visitor accommodation and accessibility

- Dog poop bags help to keep the park clean. Citizens for Off-Leash Areas does not supply Seward Park and neither does Seattle Parks and Recreation.
- Restrooms – Restrooms, except the main comfort station at the front of the park, close in the winter to prevent pipe freezing. A port-a-potty at the north end of the park provides some relief, but winter access to the restroom near heavily used picnic shelter #3 would be especially helpful. A long-term solution should be considered. The existing comfort stations lack baby-changing tables, a significant inconvenience for parents of young children.
- ADA accessible trails plan – The 2008 Trails Plan proposed two **ADA-compliant accessible trails**. The Earthquake Scarp trail loop is ADA-compliant, except that it lacks a barricade or signage for the stairs that are present on one end. An unexecuted plan provides for ADA access via the Bald Eagle Trail and Squebeqsd trail deep into the forest to the S curve/Windfall Trailheads. Access from the amphitheater would also be possible. Lower loop is difficult for strollers and wheelchairs.
- The crosswalk near the Clay Studio has a curb cut on one end but not the other.
- There is not adequate lighting after dark near the Audubon center.
- Historical/cultural legacy issues
- The tennis courts were specified in the Olmsted plan, and new courts have recently replaced the old ones courtesy of SPU's CSO project. The MOA with the National Park Service requires SPU and SPR to develop an historical walking tour with at least six historical sites, a phone app, and appropriate signage. Six new historical signs will be installed by the tennis courts, but so far the walking tour and phone app have not happened. Input from the Friends of Seward Park on historical sites seems to have been rebuffed.
- The playground was also specified in the Olmsted plan. The undergrowth under the big cedars in the playground area has been trampled to death, and the compacted soil threatens the long-term survival of the large cedars. A partial fence approved by SPR has been ineffective in preventing soil compaction.
- Japanese gifts through the years – The Japanese garden lost its character and needs maintenance and pruning. There was a torii in Seward Park and it is being replaced. FSP would like to have interpretive signage for the gifts from Japan.
- Buildings are qualified to be on the National Register of Historic Places. FSP would like Interpretive display about Works Progress Administration structures.
- Starflower native plant garden needs labels.
- Pista sa nasyon is Seward Park's largest event; they have asked for potable water access in amphitheater.
- Seward is a regional park – Friends of Seward Park does not have an adequate support base and struggles to find people with sustained interest.

The SPR arborist responding to the conversation regarding forest die-off says longer term cycles are coming into play; organisms in the soil are responding to the stress in the hemlocks. Cedars are being attacked by a native insect that doesn't normally cause harm, but because of drought they are running rampant and doing more damage. Root organisms take over sections of old growth and replace them with broadleaf trees. It is a city-wide issue.

People are all over the park and in all corners and decay organisms cannot be managed the same way in an urban setting.

Natural Resources Unit, Jon Jainga mentions that the trees in high traffic areas at Seward Park have been inventoried and assessed.

Briefing: Olmsted Legacy in Boston, MA

- Margaret Dyson, Director of Historic Parks at Boston Parks and Recreation
- The Emerald Necklace
 - 9 parks designed with the intent to connect downtown parks with the public gardens and expanding neighborhoods
- The partnership system
 - No separate agency or organization working on Olmsted park preservation
 - Emerald Necklace Conservancy, a 501(c)(3), serves as more of an educational partner; Margaret said it struggles with "who it is" and "who it wants to be"
 - Large involvement during the community engagement process, however.
 - Parks are owned, managed and maintained primarily by City of Boston Parks and Recreation
 - Parkways are managed by the State
 - State wanted to have control over roadway network, for example, when they need to expand roadways
 - A few parks in the City of Brookline as well, managed by Brookline
- Margaret's role
 - Helping ensure consideration of historical context of parks
 - Working with landscape architects, project managers and the maintenance team
- Funding mechanisms
 - Primary financial source is City of Boston tax dollars
 - A Parks Trust Fund
 - Set up through the Emerald Necklace Conservancy
 - The Fund for Parks and Recreation
 - A non-profit raising money for parks projects in Boston
 - Using a real estate surcharge tax to fund parks capital projects as well as affordable housing
- Things to consider
 - No separate written set of guidelines for maintenance of historic parks like Olmsted parks; Margaret described more of a "culture" of considering historic context of parks during preservation projects
 - Important to think about who has management and decision-making powers

- What is the shared vision if there is a partnership involving more than one department? If the vision is the same, it matters less who implements them

She has the same frustrations of not enough money for maintenance and staffing errors in landscaping.

>>SPR and SDOT agreement –SDOT and SPR were working on an agreement to determine how to delegate work on the park boulevards. Donald feels this needs to get into a recommendation from the Olmsted group.

“Friends of” groups that are involved and have money will have more resources to devote to parks that are more affluent. This results in an unequitable system.

Donald says the Emerald Necklace, Boston’s Olmsted parks system, receives State money. There are no set guidelines but a culture of maintaining historic parks. The taskforce is curious about how they educate and train the staff for landscaping.

Kathleen Conner, Planning Manager at SPR, keeps her eye on the Landmark Preservation aspect of parks and facilities.

Next Steps:

Taskforce to decide about when and what to present to the Park Board.

They would like to create an outline of topics addressed and what to do moving forward.

Longer session: The taskforce will look to convene a longer meeting in July to dig deeper and talk potential solutions. Up to now, they have been information gathering and feel prepared to start formulating preliminary recommendations.

The group needs an opportunity to share ideas before presenting to the Park Board. They should review the charge and highlight expectations and coalesce around what the Superintendent is expecting.

>>>Danyal to check on date: 4pm on July 25
Doug will circulate an email to see if people are available.

Park Board presentation to include: Report on information obtained; groups that presented; and ideas the group is considering.

Park district – The Park District Committee (city council) presentation mentioned the Olmsted Taskforce and the work they are doing. This adds credibility to this group and their charge.

Public Comment

A woman gets up from the audience and asks if she can present at a future meeting. Lake Washington Boulevard is on the historic registry and is part of the Olmsted’s Plan. She is concerned about the environmental impacts the new moorage lessee will have on the shoreline with the increased slip sizes. The Taskforce feels this is more appropriate for a Park Board meeting and they will not be having any presentations at the next meeting. It will be a working meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourns at 8:30pm.